

# **HOMOSEXUALITY, GOD, & THE CHURCH**

**THREE GAY MUSICIANS TELL THEIR STORIES**

**DOWN THE LINE MAGAZINE  
SPECIAL ISSUE MAY 2010**

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## CAN YOU HANDLE THE TRUTH?

“Without vision, the people perish.” Or another way to put it: Without a clear vision of what to do, the loonies will come in and force their agenda. This is exactly what is happening with the homosexuality issue in the church: so few want to deal with it, so the loonies like the “God Hates Fags” movement rush in to fill the void. I am completely convinced that God hates the spirit behind the people that promote such hatred. But since the church won’t deal with the issue – sometimes even pretending that it doesn’t exist – we have to deal with the extremes whackos.

The Bible challenges everyone to change and grow – so to just saying that we are who we are and there is nothing we can do about it doesn’t agree with about half of the scriptures out there. But the whole “can’t you just stop sinning and being gay?” philosophy hasn’t ever worked for anyone, either.

We don’t have the answers. We just want to raise the question. You might come to a very different conclusion than we would. That is okay. The important thing is to think and talk and engage an issue instead of ignoring it.

<http://www.downthelinezine.com>

Steve’s Corner	5
Sean Doty	6
dUg Pinnick	17
Ric Alba	21
Reviews	29

**COMING SOON:**  
Interviews with  
Jerry Chamberlain  
The Reign  
The C.U.E.

# DOWN THE LINE

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## VISION:

Down the Line covers bands that explored the intersection between faith and art in the 1980s through the early 1990s - even though they were probably never accepted in to what is called "Contemporary Christian Music" because they were too edgy or alternative or liberal or for whatever reason. Some of these bands may still be making music today, and others may have moved on. We cover these bands (active or dormant) as well as any new projects by former members of these bands and any new bands that may have the same spirit as these bands.

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(there would be a whole lot more technical mumbo jumbo in this space if we were more professional. But that would be boring and all...)

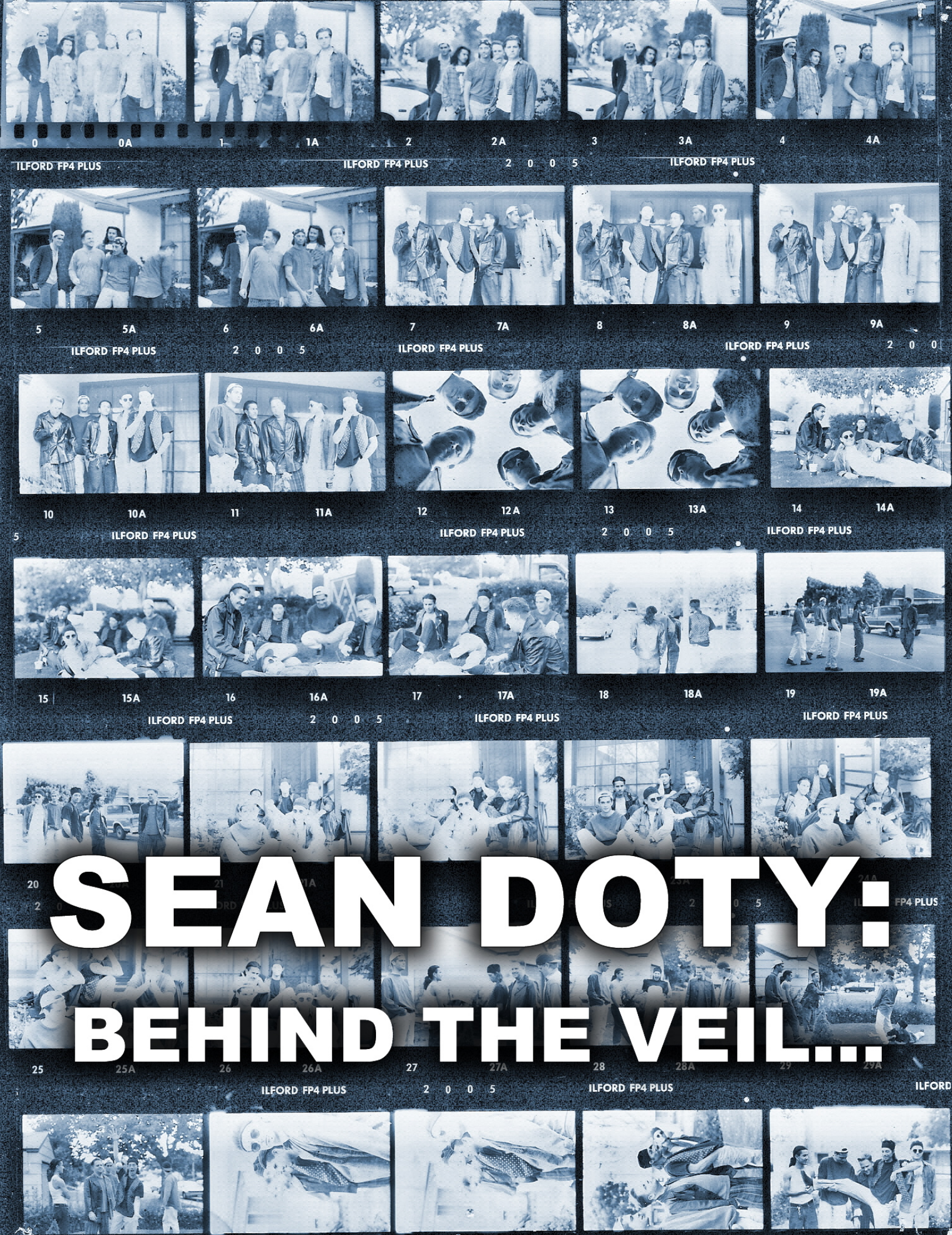


Homosexuality is a hot button topic in the church. It ranks right up there with the abortion debate, but homosexuality employs many other side issues as well. The "is it or isn't it sin" debate rages, and depending on where you land on that question, the "what do we do with it now" debate rages as well. It encompasses the issue of civil unions, gay marriage and the ever unfolding wide ranging debate of equality. For this writer I have heard many stances taken on homosexuality through the years growing up in the church and being around other believers. This issue appears to be one that really gets at the core of what we believe, and for so many other issues in the church, homosexuality is a lightning rod of controversy, sympathy, apathy and even hate. In my opinion, we make theological bubbles and theological excuses for many things, but never for homosexuality. Again, just my opinion here, but I think this is something the church doesn't really understand and know how to deal with, so it's just easier to put it in a box and be done with it.

This is not an attempt to argue for or against homosexuality – that is something that every person can do for themselves. This is an attempt to shed light on the way that the church has treated this issue, and these people, down through the decades. This is a small attempt to give voice to some of my favorite musicians in regards to this subject. Most everyone reading this has been touched personally by the music of The Altar Boys, Undercover, Veil of Ashes, King's X, and Dead Artist Syndrome. I have been personally impacted in various ways by these bands down through the years, and I wanted to give them the voice to share their story, the way they lived it and the things they encountered from their perspective.

In trying to decide the most effective way to get these stories across, we figured a straight question & answer format was best. These are word for word in the artist's language, exactly as they expressed themselves. Matt and I batted a couple of ideas back and forth about how to do this, and we decided to completely steer clear of theology and politics, we just want you to read these stories as they were told to us. Politics and theology do nothing but divide and dissect, but I figure that everyone reading this likes good music, and I'm sure we can agree on one thing; that it is long since time we put down our judgments, our ideas and our differences, and we learned to listen and to love in spite of ourselves and in spite of our own preconceived notions. People are people, we all are trying to just figure things out and make the best of ourselves in the best way we can. We all come into this place kicking and screaming, and trying to just learn to live inside of our own skin can be a daunting task at best. There is always at least one thing that people can find common ground on, let's start there and find our similarities and not our differences. It's a big world full of people and ideals that are created by something so much bigger than us. I'm sure there are some issues that are just beyond a simple cut and dried answer or response.

I want to thank Sean, Ric and dUg for allowing me to pry into their personal life and for being so open, honest and forthright. I feel blessed to be able to talk with some of my favorite musicians about their art, their lives and their journey. I hope the interviews here are read, appreciated and can open up dialogue about an issue that touches most all of us, even if only from a distance. Thanks for taking the time to read.



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# SEAN DOTY: BEHIND THE VEIL...

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*Interview by Steve Ruff*

*Just a quick word before you read about Sean. Not only did Sean front Veil of Ashes, but he also played in earlier incarnations of Dead Artist Syndrome. If you haven't ever heard Dead Artists Syndrome's second offering Devils, Angels and Saints, you should check out iTunes and download a piece of music history. Thanks again to Sean who was instrumental in pushing me to interview dUg and Ric...*

#### **When/how did Veil Of Ashes come together?**

Veil of Ashes came together over hair. I was at a 77's concert and saw this guy with really cool hair. It looked like a landing strip coming out of his forehead. I just had to go up and talk with him, and I found out through conversation that he was a drummer. That was Mr. Phil Meads. I told him I had been working on some music looking for a band. Most of what I was working on was keyboard related since I had only taken one guitar lesson in my life, and that didn't go so well. Keyboard and drums seemed an odd combination, but we decided to get together. Soon after a friend of mine, Nelson DiMarco (later to be a Blonde Vinyl recording artist, currently the man behind Batzz In the Belfrey), introduced us to

Sterling (Brian Kirsch) a local bass player. Weird name, great bassist. Since the keyboard thing wasn't going to work out I reluctantly picked up the guitar and started writing songs with about 3 or 4 chords all done in different sequence!

#### **Why did Veil break up?**

Veil broke up because we had had enough of record companies, lawyers, and under promoted concerts. Also, we were getting married and having kids. It just wasn't that fun anymore. We were actually writing for a new album at the time and some finished demos do exist of 3 or 4 songs that were pretty good, if I do say so myself.

#### **Being one of the early founders of the 'Christian alternative' scene, what were some of the obstacles that VOA faced as a band early on?**

Our biggest obstacle was that we were too secular for the Christian crowd and too Christian for the secular crowd. Gene Simmons once said that we would be a great band if we would just drop the Jesus sh\*t. It was easier for us to be part of the secular world though. We opened for some of the biggest bands of our time, Chris Isaak, Psychedelic Furs, Social Distortion, 4 Non Blondes, etc. On and on. We

also headlined some of the biggest clubs in SF and LA. It seemed that the secular crowd would forgive us more than the Christian crowd, and since we had a greater impact with the secular audiences, that's the direction that we pursued.

#### **How did you guys end up getting signed to Blonde Vinyl records?**

Blonde Vinyl... I honestly don't remember how that happened! I was a casual friend of Knott's at the time through concerts and doing backup vocals for a Brian Healy project. I think he enjoyed the early Veil of Ashes more than the direction we were going. Since we had sold quite a few copies of our earlier stuff out of the back of a car, I think he was excited about the prospect of bringing that music to the masses. This is over 20 years ago, so my mind is a bit cloudy, Knott can help you out on this one!

#### **What are your thoughts/ideas on how the scene has changed over the last 20+ years?**

Wow, I have a limited knowledge of the scene now since I rarely listen to Christian music. I would say though that from what I can tell the bands have finally found their way into the secular market. That is way cool. That's what the early bands like us had been trying to do for

years. I honestly think we helped open up the doors for many of those bands.

**Any plans to play/record/etc. anytime in the future?**

No plans to record in the future. We are old and recognize that we have responsibilities. I have an ex wife and daughter to support, and many of the other Veil guys throughout the years are married and have multiple kids, are stable in their jobs and active in the church. Also, alternative rock is a young mans game, we are too old for that anymore! I can't imagine jumping around on stage in leather pants as a balding, chubby 45 year old. However, I will say that there are some unreleased recordings that if someone wanted to put them out after all these years we would be willing to talk.

(ed. note) There is a different story to that now ☺ Check the Veil Of Ashes face book page and see what the guys have recently been up to!

**Is it true that VOA was banned from rotation on Christian stations? Why was that, what's the back story there?**

Yes, we were banned. Our song "Queen For A Day" was sliding up the charts until someone realized that it was a tribute to Freddy Mercury of Queen, one of the greatest singers and bands of all time. I never understood why that was a bad thing. It seems to me that God granted him the talent to write and sing such beautiful music. Why can't I as a Christian appreciate God's gift to the world? I don't remember who banned it first, but it was a pretty prominent radio station. A magazine slammed us for it and suggested that stations refuse to play it. And the song slid right back down the charts.

I guess this was the start of our disillusionment in Christian radio and publications. The success we had had with them was destroyed.

They had branded us. I mean at one point on the first album we had the number six rock song in the country above Petra's single at the time. Pulse magazine and CCM were hyping our record. I think we thought we could do just about anything we wanted to do, we had bad judgment and we were wrong. Also, I just heard recently we were

molested by a youth leader when I was 14. Did that make me gay? Was I gay before that? I don't know. I think he forever ruined the ability for me to discern that. I think that science is proving that there is a gay gene, so I lean towards the born that way. From my earliest memory I don't remember thinking about girls in a sexual way, but I



## VEIL of ASHES

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one of the bands that LIVE listened to when they were in high school. That was a huge thing for me to hear. I guess we were in places that we didn't even know about until now.

**Getting the obvious out of the way - I know you are gay, when did you come to terms with that?**

Does everyone know now? I guess that's what happens when you come out in a Christian book. I don't know that I have come to terms with it yet. It still is a big question between God and I. I know He loves me. I know He cares for me.

**Do you believe 'born gay' or being gay is a choice?**

I don't know if I was created this way, or made this way. I was

was always looking at guys in a sexual way.

**With the way that Christendom reconciles homosexuality, how did you handle 'coming out' in terms of your faith and your friends?**

I was always afraid to admit my sexuality. I fought against it, prayed against it and went to ex-gay ministries. I even got married thinking that that would make me straight. I don't regret that, although my ex-wife probably does. I have a beautiful daughter from that, she turned 16 this year. I always thought that God could never use me, could never love me, that I was a deep disappointment to Him. I felt that my parents would be so hurt by it. That my friends would ridicule me. That the church would ask me to

## 7 DOWN THE LINE

leave. That I would be kicked out of Christian college. My dad is a pastor, I was afraid that his ministry would be affected by it. Then later while in the band I was afraid that the work we were doing and accomplishing would be destroyed if people knew. A whole life lived in fear.

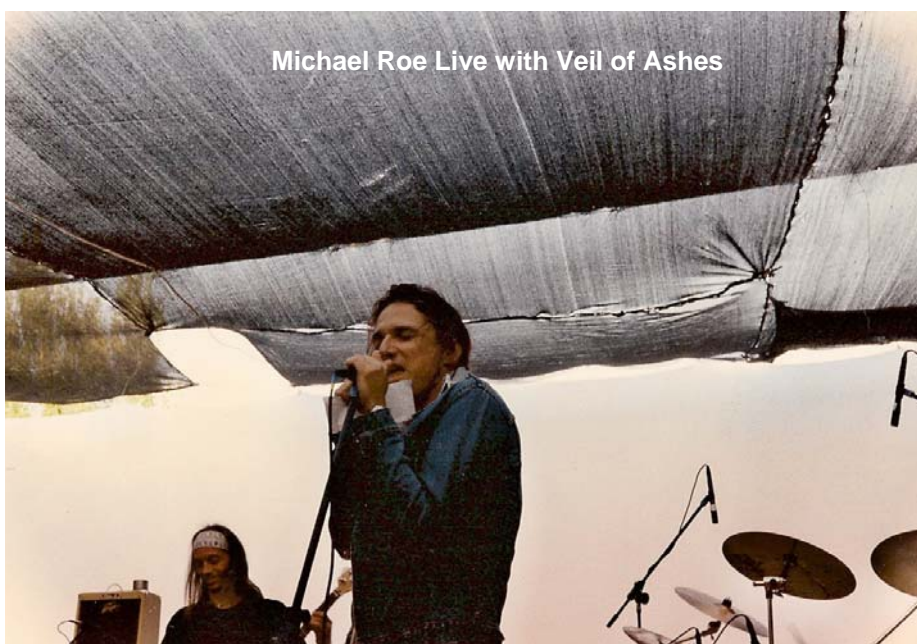
I guess by coming out I feel a certain freedom from all that fear. For the first time I feel like I am me. One of the great things I have learned is that my parents still love me just the same. I am sure they pray a lot for me and that they worry about my salvation, but they love me. Many church people have accepted me. They haven't accepted the gay part, but they accept me as a person without judgment. I guess that is the beauty of people really under the work of Christ.

### **How is your relationship with your ex-wife and your daughter?**

I currently have no relationship with either one. I have not seen my daughter for almost 6 years now. Her choice. Never ever talk to the ex. I believe she poisoned my daughter against me by telling her that daddy was gay and going to hell. I have heard from my daughter recently a few times through Facebook. So maybe things are starting to heal or she is growing old enough to make some decisions on her own. It's my greatest prayer that we are reconciled soon. I miss and love my daughter very much. There is a huge hole in my life.

### **Was it difficult coming out in a Christian book (*God's Not Dead and Neither Are We*)? Why did you decide to do it then?**

Well, it wasn't really that hard. I had just broken up with my boyfriend of almost 6 years. I was still deep in the grieving stage. I had actually tried to kill myself over the break up. When we got to the interview I felt that it was so raw and undeniable at that point that I



might as well tell the world. It didn't make much sense to keep quiet about something you were willing to die over.

### **When you came out in the book, were you already out with your family? (parents, etc.)**

My parents know and have known. I don't think they know about the book and that's probably a good thing. They would want to know why in the world I would share with the world something so personal. Why share something that really doesn't define me? I think they are right on that count. I am not a gay man. I am Sean Doty. I am way more than gay. That probably is the littlest thing in my life that I am.

### **How did the church and the college respond?**

The church as a whole doesn't know. I am sure that there are many in my past from old churches that know because of rumors (just got to love that Christian gossip line). Either they have quietly disappeared from my life or quietly loved me anyway. I am sure that many of them don't want to know for sure anyway. They would just like to remember me as Sean the preacher's kid who sang in church. As for college, they did know. They sent me to counseling there at the

school. There were tons of rumors going on about me anyway. My poor sister was at college with me and had to hear those rumors and had to stand up for her brother. I did not participate in any homosexual activity at college, but they thought I did. Eventually I was kicked out, but it wasn't over being gay. I had had a drink at a professor's house and it was found out after I brought it up with an apology to the leadership of the school. I was given one day to pack up my stuff and get out. That professor stayed on staff for many years, so I can't help but think that my being gay had something to do with it!

### **Can you explain the sentence from the question above: If church people haven't accepted the gay part, have they really accepted you, or accepted you without judgment? Do you believe there is such a thing as 'hate the sin, love the sinner' and can you elaborate on that?**

I used to believe in hate the sin but love the sinner until I heard Tony Campolo say that that was a false statement that the Bible does not teach. It teaches love the sinner, but hate the sin within me. Now Biblically that makes a lot of sense. There are a lot of passages that deal with that. I don't know if the





church has accepted me or not. More they haven't turned their backs on me. Most of my old friends, old and young, still show a great amount of love to me, in fact I have only lost one Facebook friend from my past who heard about me and that was my high school Bible teacher. All in all, people choose to love me and probably spend a lot of time praying for me. But that's not a bad thing!

#### **How did the guys in Veil Of Ashes respond? Was everyone in Veil a believer?**

The guys in Veil saw me as an EX gay which was something that I believed I was at the time. I even shared my testimony in concert from time to time while opening for bands like the 77's and the Violet Burning. I think it wasn't until I was in that 6 year relationship with a guy that I finally told Sterling. Frankly, I don't think any of the other guys know to this day. I don't wear a sign around my head. My Facebook or MySpace doesn't shout it out. Although if you were to search friend by friend you would find that I have a very high amount of gay friends!!

(ed. note) Since this part of the interview, Sean has spoken with the other guys in Veil and explained where he is in his journey.)

#### **Why is it (by your estimation) that in 'the church' there are so many grey areas that we make allowances for, but never with the issue of homosexuality?**

To be honest I think people have separated out a hierarchy of sins. Three are bigger than all the rest. Homosexuality, abortion, and divorce. In my life time at least these have been the major no no's. I don't know why these are so heinous to the church. Wish I did.

#### **Why is the 'gay but celibate' issue so dominant? By that theology it isn't being gay that is the issue, it's having sex... with so many hetero's in the church having sex, what's the issue? Your thoughts?**

Wow, that's a good point isn't it? It's like the sanctity of marriage question. Why are people so upset that gay people get married? To protect marriage? A huge portion of marriages end in divorce! How about outlawing divorce? That would really protect marriage! I think gay but celibate is a way of people passing on love to gay people. In other words, it's okay to be gay, just don't have sex. I think that concept has caught on in my own brain though. As I said earlier, that would be ideal for me. Because I have not fully allowed myself to be gay and a Christian, it

gives me an out. It allows me to fall in love with a guy without dealing with the matter of sin. But again, I don't think it's possible unfortunately, men are very sexual creatures, and I think that love and sex go hand in hand. So I am not sure the concept of gay and celibate really works when you get down to it.

#### **Can Jesus be separated from the church's theology on this issue?**

I am not sure that I understand the question. Is there a separation between Jesus and the churches theology? See, I am still not totally comfortable with denying that I might be totally outside of God's will. Jesus did teach to love everyone, and I am not sure that most churches aren't trying to do that. I think most churches would allow any gay people into their church. (I am not sure that I answered that question)

**I get what you're saying... by that last question what I guess I meant is that people take what the church proclaims as "God's law". In so many cases we take theology as what God dictates, and maybe it was never God, maybe it is just someone's interpretation of scripture. So, in dividing the two I guess what I am saying is that do you believe Christ can accept you as you are, regardless of how a theology dictates that He sees you? You did touch on that really... in your last response where you said, "I think most churches would allow any gay people into their church," I tend to think that I would agree with you... but, will they allow them into the church without trying to change them or without fully accepting them as Christian and gay?**

Yeah, no doubt that God loves me just as I am. I still have a problem though with believing that there is a separation between what God's law and its interpretation are. If I felt wholly that the interpretation

was wrong, I would be a happy gay man. Right now I am still conflicted. Does Christ "accept" me as I am. I believe He does. Will the church try and change me? Of course! On a whole the church believes that homosexuality is a sin. Why wouldn't they want to deliver me from sin? They would want to see me live in victory over sin. That said, I don't think theology teaches that God does not accept me. I go back to the example of David in the Psalms. Did God accept David? Yes, and that's a big yes! Gosh, God gave him a whole book in the Bible! God gave him a tremendous gift as a songwriter.

If homosexuality is a sin, then it is no different then David's continual sin, or the gossip, the tax collector, the obese pastor, the deacon that cheats on his taxes, the pastor who has lust in his heart for his church secretary, the woman that gets an abortion, or the couple in church who just got a divorce. The Bible does say, "Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound?" "No"... but we all do. It does not justify it, but it is covered by God's grace and mercy. I guess the troubling thing goes back to the fact that the church treats some sins worse than others. I don't see them putting hands on the obese guy and praying for him, you know? I guess I will wrap this up with this verse. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

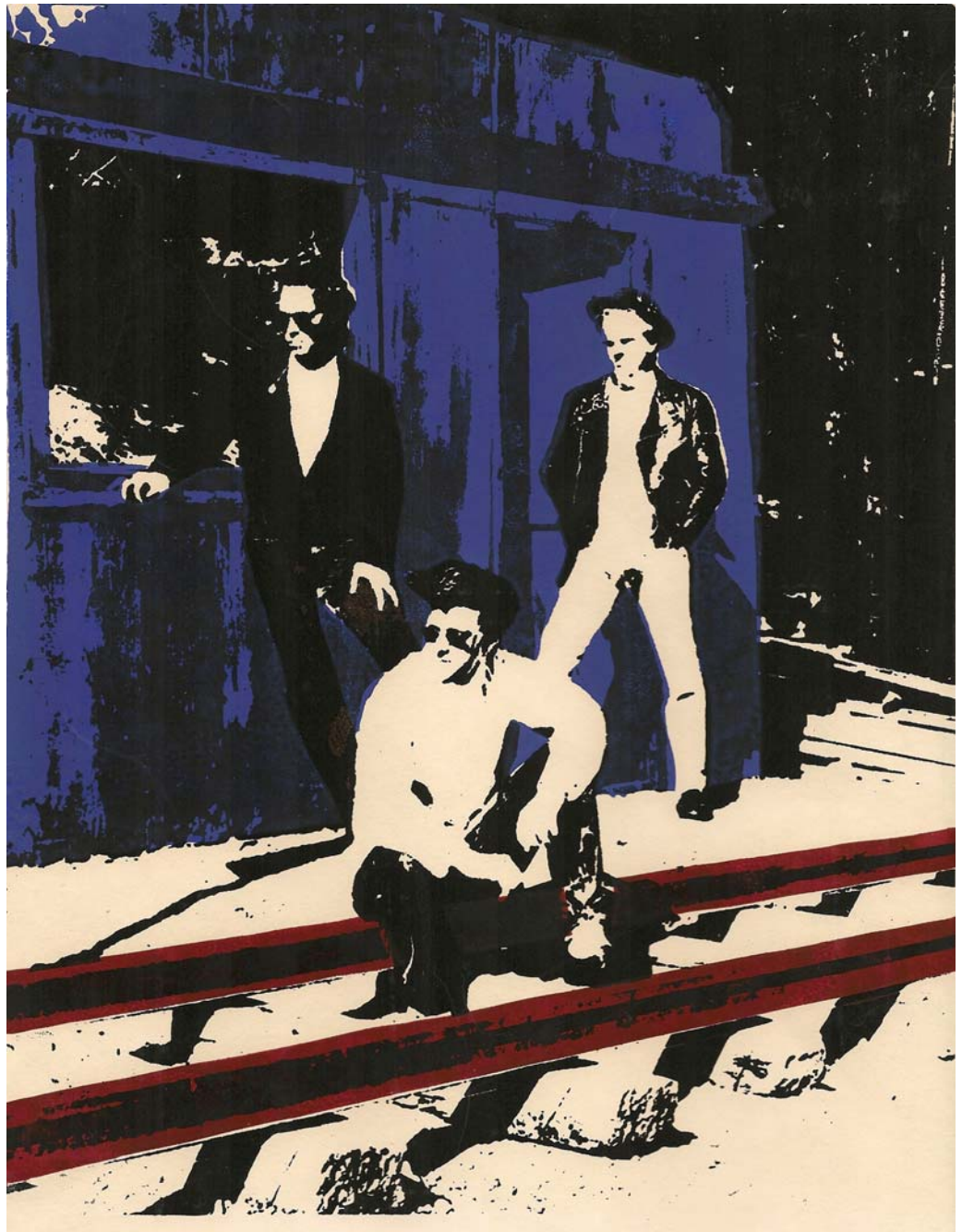
**What would you like to add to this, anything that you want people to know?**

Wow, I could add so much. Most of it about the struggles and the uncertainty of my own faith. The insecurities of being so inadequate before God. I kind of feel like David in the Psalms, a huge sinner that God still loves. It boggles the mind. Why would God still love

me when I am such a huge sinner?

My being gay is not about the sexual aspect of it as much as it is the heart aspect. I find it quite easy to go without sex with a guy. So some people would say that I am not really gay then, but I don't think that I could ever fall in love with a woman. My heart wants to fall in love with a man. That is where I find true happiness. If I could have a relationship with a man that did not include sex, I think that would be the ideal for me because it would alleviate the guilt and would make the heart happy.

Unfortunately I haven't found that. Because we are men it may be impossible to find two men that don't care about sex. So I might be living in a fantasy world. I think that it may be impossible too, because people that are in love want to physically express that. So again, I might be hoping for something unrealistic. All in all, I just want to love and be loved by a man. I think that that's the bottom line. I am afraid that people will find that incredibly distasteful, but in my mind it is terribly romantic, and something that I long for with every part of me.



# VEIL OF ASHES

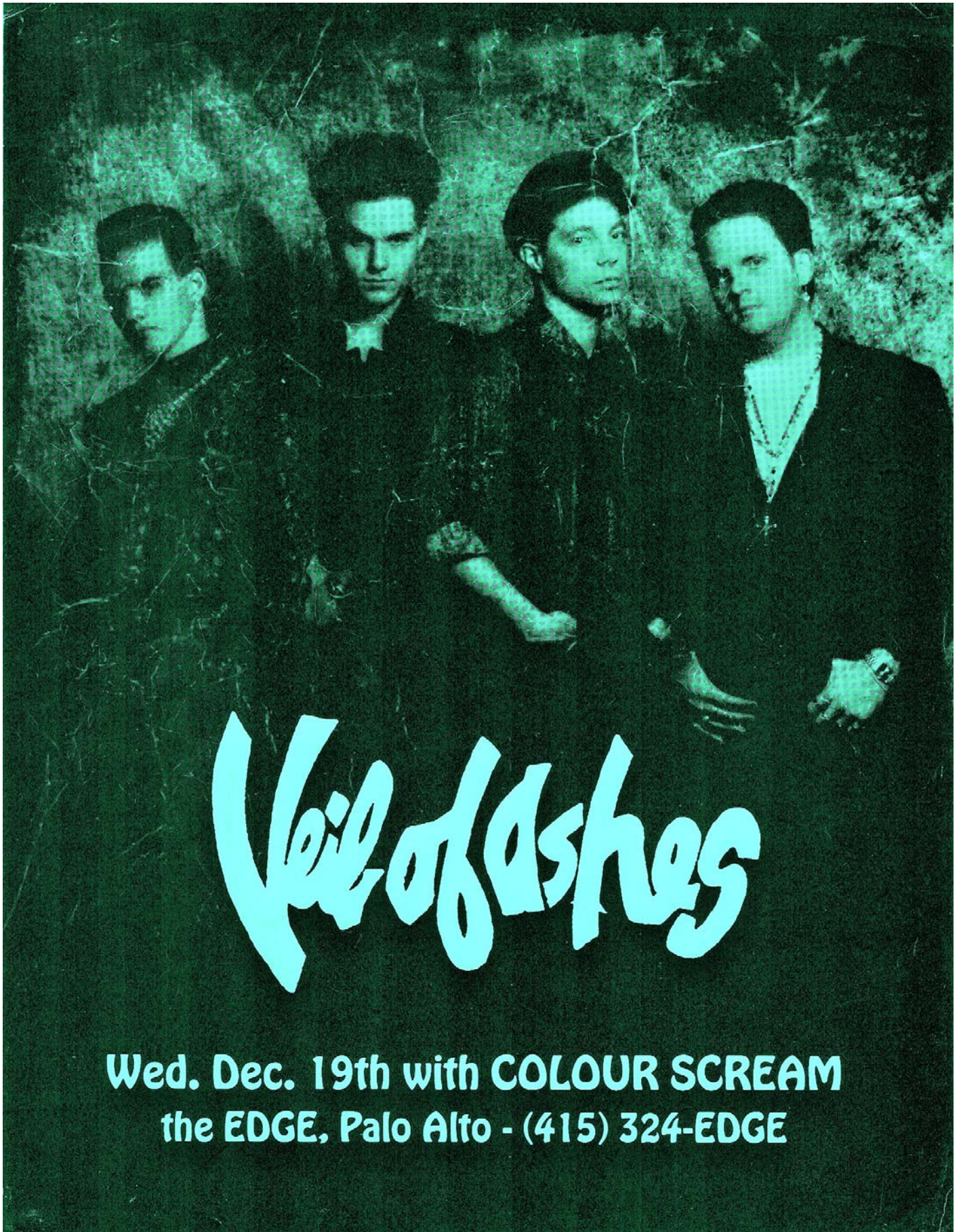
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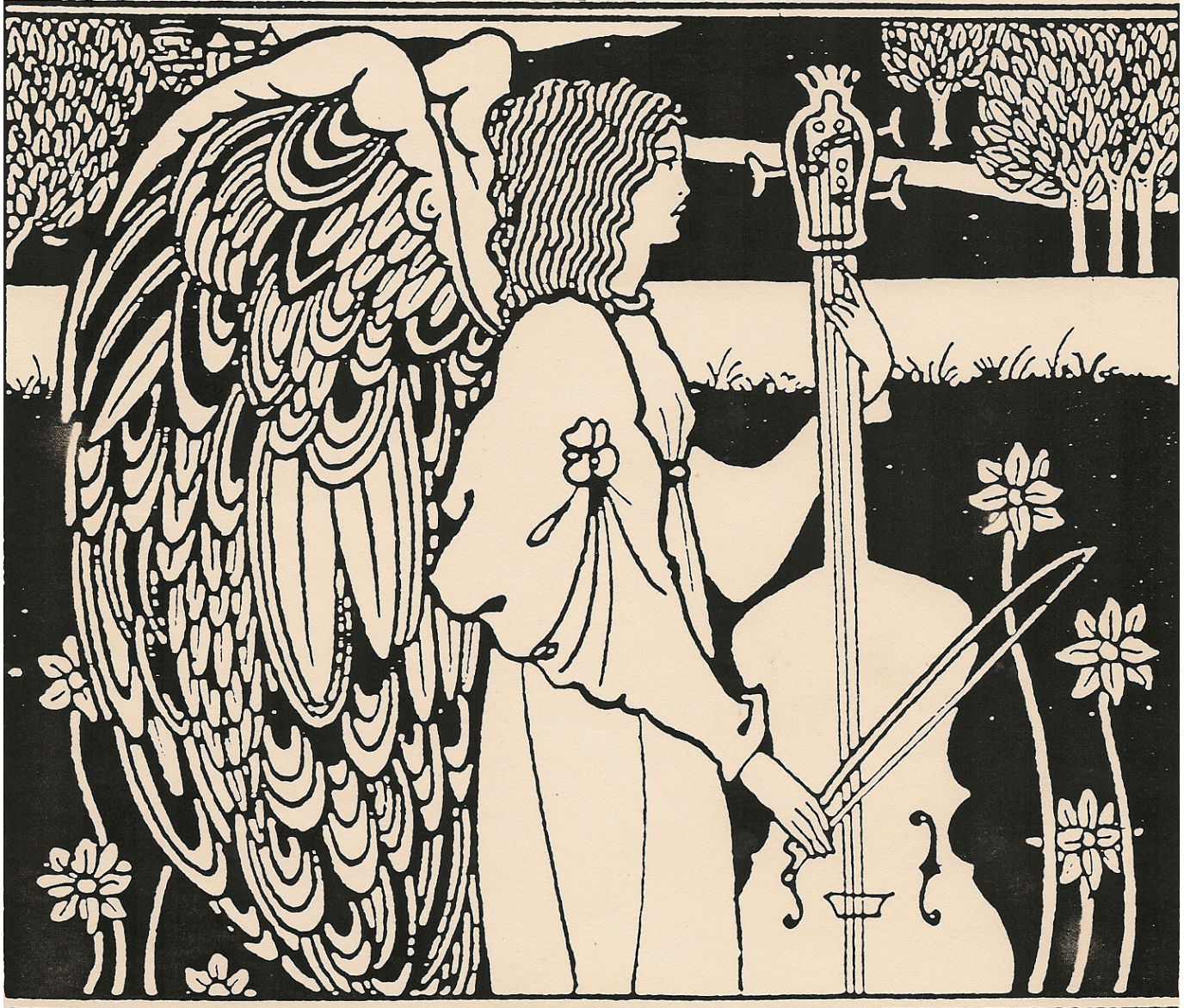
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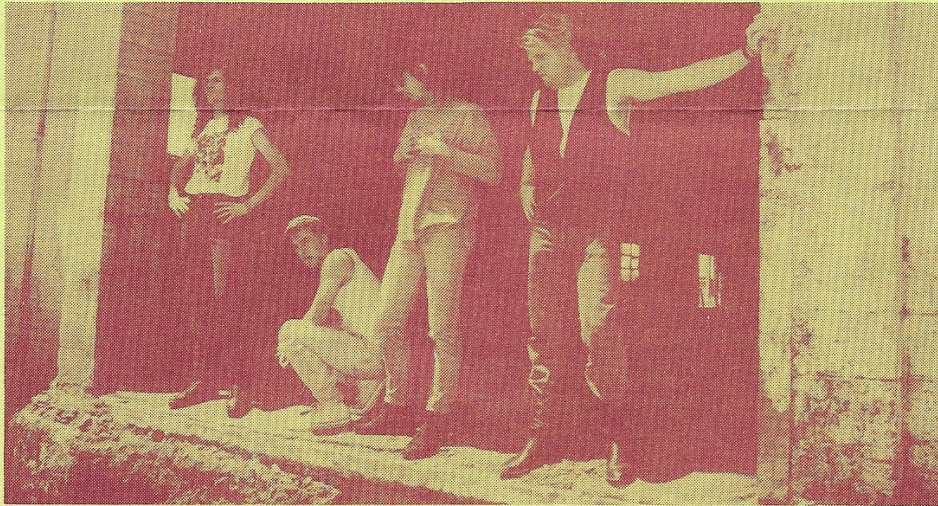
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# DUG PINNICK



## There is No Room Inside a Box

*Interview by Steve Ruff*

### **Where do you stand in your beliefs toward Christianity, Jesus, etc.**

I would say that I'm either agnostic or atheist... Agnostic means you're just not sure, but I border atheism. I don't really believe in anything that has sat down and talked to anybody, put it that way.

### **Did you come to that because of the way you were treated in regards to your coming out?**

No, no I didn't, it was a natural progression. I've read in articles and heard through the grapevine that people have said I walked away from God because I wasn't successful or because I was gay, but to me that's sort of insulting because why would I walk away from God no matter what? Ya know, where are you gonna go if you believe in God? If you believe in the Christian God you can't get away from him and you're gonna go to hell if you don't follow Jesus and do the right thing, so ya know, where am I gonna go? I would be a big idiot to just give up and die and go to hell. I think it's pretty ridiculous to think that, and I'm not saying you think that but there are people who seem to find joy in bringing that subject up and I always think, "Wow", but I'm just really not that shallow.

Someone asked me a real long, long time ago, "Did you leave God because you weren't successful?" The bottom line is they must not understand the depth of their faith, or the depth of my faith and what I believe. I believe 100% whole-heartedly, I've got all kinds of different paranormal experiences and God encounters if you want to call them that. As I grew and started looking at what was going on, and as I started studying religions and paranormal activity and just ancient religions and on down the line, I just realized it's all in your mind and it's all subject to argument and it's all subject to being not true. I just got to a point that took me at least about 15 years, where I just don't believe in it, but it wasn't something that I just got up one day and said, "I'm done, I'm walking away, bye God." It was the more that I learned, Christianity just didn't make sense, and it got the point where the reasonable doubt outweighed anything that had any substance to it, and to the point that the reasonable doubt outweighed everything. Finally I just thought, "I can't do this, I can't believe something that's not real to me." People think I walked away and just said, "Oh God, I don't want you", it ain't that, I just don't believe, it's just not there.



The thing about Christians and being gay and stuff, I mean the Bible says that it's a sin. That is in the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament. They don't talk about it but like three times in the whole Bible, ya know, they talk about murder, they talk about adultery, they talk about all kinds of stuff over and over in the bible, and they very seldom talk about homosexuality or make a big deal about it. The thing is, if it's wrong in the Bible, it's a sin, and the Bible says it's an abomination, one of the things God hates the most, in fact almost THE most. An abomination is what God completely hates and cannot forgive you for, and then they throw that on gay people. What are people going to do with that? Basically they either kill themselves or live a miserable life or they do things they don't want to do like get married and act straight. Then later on they leave their wives for someone else and ruin their kid's lives.

I think the church ruins gay people's lives because they just won't let them be who they are, and they don't understand who they are either. They put us in the category of child molesters and murderers, and that's bullsh\*t. You know most child molesters are straight, and murderers, what do you do with that? They kill people ya know? I mean, I'm gay, so you say I'm just like a person who kills somebody? The other thing is the church believes it's a choice, like "Oh, I choose to do this vile terrible thing", and I'm going "It ain't no choice at all". If I had the choice I don't think anybody gay... you could ask anybody who's gay, and I could be wrong, but you ask any gay person if they had a choice to be straight or gay would they choose to be gay, and they would all say no. Why would you choose to be hated by the world, be the scourge of the world, be hated by God, be damned in the church, be ostracized by your family and your parents? To be subjected to being killed, murdered, beat up and be a victim of hate crimes, I could keep on going down the line ya know. I mean movie stars lose their careers and rock stars lose their status over being gay, so I mean the bottom line is, why would somebody choose that? I don't think anybody would.

Then these people say that it's just a mental thing. It's just like being left handed or right handed, you have blue eyes or green eyes, it's like feeling you're a woman in a man's body or vice versa. They think it's a mental thing or it just might be a mental disorder. Ya know, for all we know it could be like autism or something, I don't know. Then somebody says, "Well just because it's a mental thing still doesn't mean it's right." I mean, how do you deal with that? If you're a paraplegic does that mean you're gonna hate yourself or that the church is gonna kick you out because your not fit for God? That is what they did in the old days, ya know? We know that, that's why Jesus tried to help the poor so much, because those people couldn't go into the temple, they were not deemed good enough to go into the temple in the presence of God just to be saved and to be healed and accepted. As far as I'm concerned, in my life, religion is just complete 100% bullsh\*t and I don't want no part of it.

**I hear where you're coming from... that was a heavy load there, but I'm glad you cleared up the speculation about why you left the faith and...**

And you know what else pisses me off more than anything? When a Christian wants to talk to me about what I believe or what I've been through, and I never condemn them, I never say they're wrong or whatever... but, if you're a Christian and you live your life the best you can and you are at peace with yourself, I've got no problems with you. When they turn around and say, "well you're still gonna have to stand before God, you still will have to do that" and I'm saying "I don't believe in God" and they say, "you're still gonna have to believe." That's when I just get angry and I say "okay, you win, I lose if that's what you want."

I was watching an atheist one time on TV, he's the guy that has that show Inside the Actors Studio (James Lipton) where he interviews movie stars. He's an atheist I guess, and this

one time somebody sat down and interviewed him. The last question they asked was "Since you're an atheist, when you die and have to stand before God what do you think he'll say to you?" He looked up without blinking his eye and he said, "This is what God will say, "I was right, you were wrong, now come on in." You know? Isn't that God? Listen Steve, I figure it this way... if the Christian God is real, which I don't believe, but if He is real then He understands why I feel the way I do, why I am who I am and why I have come to this conclusion and I don't believe He could find fault in it because it's what He would have wanted.

**I'm glad we cleared that up because I was under the same impression. I thought you had come out of the closet and because of the way you had been treated you walked away from the faith.**

No, but I knew exactly what people would say. I was a Christian once, I know exactly what they do. When I came out I knew what they were going to do, they even banned our records in Christian bookstores. On *Ear Candy* I sang a song called "Looking for Love" which has the line "I guess I lost my faith" and I was singing songs about not believing anymore blah, blah, blah and they never said a word, but as soon as I came out our records were banned, isn't that something?

**It's a cutthroat industry dUg, it doesn't really appear to be any different then anything else...**

That's why I didn't want to be a Christian band. You see when I played with Phil Keaggy back in the day, Jerry and I both did, we went to a big festival where these big selling Christian acts played like The Imperials and Andre Crouch, big selling bands back then and Phil Keaggy was really huge at the time too. So we did this festival and I remember going backstage really excited about meeting my hero's and these great Christian people who were playing this great Christian music and I really wanted to fellowship with them ya know, I was under the impression that all Christians were good. I got backstage and all of a sudden I saw egos, I saw attitudes and I saw a\*\*holes. At that point I realized that this was no different than anything else, and if this was the way it was going to be then I would rather just be in a regular band, go out there and play for regular people and if they turn against me that's okay because that's expected.

I just hadn't believed that these Christians would really be this way... I was very disillusioned and that was the day I decided that I was not going to do anything in the Christian realm. That's why we didn't do Cornerstone even though they kept asking us. I would have loved to play it but I knew as soon as we played it we would have been branded. We would have been branded AND we would have been questioned, and back then I was still in my closet too and I felt like a big phony. If I'm gonna talk about truth, sing about truth and about people being honest and accepting each other, well I better step up to the plate too and not be a hypocrite like the rest of them.

**Was it CCM Magazine or HM Magazine where you did the coming out story and was there an immediate backlash?**

Ummmmm, it was CCM and the only backlash we got was that I had heard our records were taken out of Christian

bookstores. Other than that I never heard another word. I remember the record company saying, "dUg, next time you decide to do something like this please let us know." (laughter)

**Another question I had was - Is there a way to separate Christ from "the Church" in matters like this, but I guess that would fall under the category of if you don't believe in Christ then...**

Well you can separate Christ from "the Church" because I've got a Bible that's in Aramaic, it's translated from what Jesus said in the Aramaic and they break it down in the English. Basically it doesn't have anything to do with the way that Christians believe, it just really doesn't. Jesus was more like the attitude of being one with God, being one with the earth, one with yourself, ya know just being at peace and loving each other, understanding each other and caring for one another. That was his biggest thrust and they turned him into this person that forgives sins and you have to accept Him in order to get to Heaven. That's just totally unrealistic to me. Besides, the whole dying for your sins thing... you know in the Old Testament, what did they do, they sacrificed lambs and the blood of an animal was supposed to atone for your sins? That's so barbaric. Then they changed it and switched it over to Jesus and that He died for our sins and His blood covers us now, and it's still so barbaric. I cannot believe in a God that would kill something for you and its blood forgives you for your sins, it's just crazy. Even the Muslims say that Christians drink blood which is bullsh\*t you know?

I just think, wow, this crazy, crazy religion that we have grown up with for so many centuries and we just can't see it. When I got out of it, got away from it and looked back at it, I thought "Oh my God, what a crazy f\*cked up religion that is, it's just as crazy as the Muslims, if not crazier. The only difference is that Christians don't do jihad, they don't kill you, but they did in the past. They went into countries and killed people if they didn't believe in God. That's our religion, and the Catholic Church started the whole thing and its complete bullsh\*t. Look at the Pope, he's the infallible word of God? Gimme a break! The Vatican has more money than any country in the world probably, and they could feed the poor but what do they do with it? They're keeping their money and they pay for lawsuits for people who are molesting little boys. Still people go to these churches and they want to believe in them... it just baffles me when religious leaders f\*ck up really bad and people just go back and follow them anyway. I wonder what is going on. It's such a blind religion that it blows my mind and I cannot accept it. That leads me back to people asking why I left. I didn't leave, it just didn't make sense to me anymore because it's not real, it's not true in my opinion.

**As far as the interview, is there anything else that you would want to add to this?**

(laughter) Well I think I pretty much said a mouthful... (more laughter)



# RIC ALBA



**“If there is an eternal kingdom beyond this one, filled with love and wonder, let no one feel he is hopelessly shut out from it, or being crushed under it.”**

*Interview By Steve Ruff*

Before you begin this amazing journey of Ric's, I want to add a special word from our friend Brian Healy of Dead Artist Syndrome. Brian wrote me a letter that said, "Do me one favor please? State it clearly and categorically that Ric Alba is the bass player for Dead Artist Syndrome. I need it clear he is 100% band member, friend and collaborator and not out there standing alone. I need it clear we are totally on his side." So there you go, straight from the Godfather of Goth himself. Please take the time to read this article, it has been years and years since Rick was around the scene, and we are fortunate that he has emerged to not only gift us with upcoming music, but I also believe his story is one of self discovery, honesty and healing.

**Was the Altar Boys the first band you were in?**

I was in quite a few different bands before I landed in Altar Boys, but I was an Altar Boy the longest by far.

**How did you get into the band? What is the history there?**

It was like growing up in a big house with lots of brothers switching rooms a lot. Me and my friend Frank had a working cover band when we started high school and I bought my first bass. When we were 18 he announced he was born again, and I started going to the home Bible study he went to. I was raised Catholic and had the core beliefs, but I never thought of a relationship with the Son of God until I met these people and saw a little of what that was like. When it really hits you that a guy bled and died for you, you start taking him pretty seriously. Knowing there was nothing I could do to make it up to him; I decided then and there that my life was his. I eventually moved into the house where we held the study. It was very like a commune.

We started an acoustic band, singing and witnessing at city parks and such until Frank met Gym Nicholson and started playing drums a new band Gym had with Joey Taylor. For me that was the Big Bang that coalesced into the Christian rock/punk-rock scene we call the 80's. They shared rehearsal space with another new band started by Chris Wimber (miss you my friend) on bass, who needed someone to play keyboards. That someone was me. After a while we all switched around and became the Lifesavors and Undercover where I played bass. Frank moved inland with a few others and formed the group, Bargain. Meanwhile the circle was widening here in Orange County, and me, Chris and Kevin from the Lifesavors, and Kevin's brother Mike held living room jams that went pretty nicely, and eventually, Mike and his cousin Jeff started their band, Altar Boys, which I joined later after leaving Undercover. Short genealogy, but it came with a lot of growing pains over a short time. Voluntarily giving up my spot in Undercover was astonishingly painful and confusing.

### What exactly did lead you to voluntarily leaving Undercover?

More aptly put, what the hell was I thinking? Anyway that story starts when I was in a band with Chris Wimber, and started going to his dad's new church that met at a gymnasium and eventually became the Anaheim Vineyard. I have to jump ahead for a sec, because I can't think of them without regretting not being around in the 90's enough to know I was losing Chris and John Wimber to illness. Chris and I spent a lot of time at his mom and dad's back when we were band mates, and I loved John for being open to new things he felt God was doing, but not every new thing was working for me.

I ran into a real snag about a thing called the gifts of the spirit. Its things we did while laying hands on people to pray for them. One gift was a kind of one-on-one prophecy, where God tells you things to tell the person you're praying for, plus there was healing, casting out demons, and a thing called "slaying in the spirit," where a person falls backward involuntarily after being tapped on the forehead. I was skeptical about some of these things, and I had no taste for exorcisms, but I was eager to get on board, to be obedient. I dove in, but nothing happened. I tried not to feel left out, but how do you not?

By the time Undercover's first album was out, a common question we got was how we each knew we were called by God to use rock music to reach people. That's when I started questioning my calling, because of my dilemma over the gifts of the spirit. Folks at church would ask me for a full report if I had a show that week, eager to hear the wondrous spiritual works they hoped we were doing to people after our shows. Well, that's not what people were coming for. Back at church, I knew that to fake it, whether meaning to or not, would mock of the realness of God. So if God wanted me in on this out in the field he would have to make it happen without me pushing it, like when people push the little Ouija board thingy to give the spirits a boost. In church, people would push and push on my forehead and there I'd stand while people all around me were being slain in the spirit, sometimes hauling up demons, getting up and slaying each other. Everyone was so sure about how real it was and how it was a promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit - the future of ministry. I took it to heart and thought God was relieving me of the ministry due to my skepticism, or worse, that I was never called to be in a band in the first place, which broke my heart. Joey, Gym, Bill, Danny and everybody were dumbfounded at my announcement to leave the band, and so was I. Within seconds after the last note at my last show with them I was crying out loud on Bill and Debbie's shoulders. If anyone remembers a baby crying on the lawn at Big Calvary after an outdoor Undercover show in '81, that was me. At 21 and a half, I was such a kid, more than I knew.

I retreated into a life of church activities with my best friend Bonnie, and we eventually got married. She encouraged me not to give up music, and about that time Mike Stand started calling me. Everyone agreed that my not being in a band was a mistake, and next thing I knew I was confirmed as an Altar Boy and fully restored to our big musical family, and boy did that feel great. Whether I was any more grown-up at 23 and a half I couldn't say. As for the gifts of the spirit, I still believed in them but I just let it go as a task assigned to others, while we had our own work to do and fun to have. Being an Altar Boy was loads of fun, and we kept everyone laughing when we weren't too hard at work. Most of the time we were typical Boys.

### What was it like, back in the day, being in one of the earliest bands in the Christian music scene?

What was unique to that time was all the unnecessary pain the more conservative types inflicted on themselves, reacting to the punk rock culture that was flooding their turf very quickly. One pastor, who was known for reaching out to the young, announced to everyone that he couldn't get behind punk rock like he did for the hippies a decade before. But by our first Cornerstone Festival, what the Jesus People in Chicago were doing with their hair and earlobes----we knew we'd always have a home there at least. And on the West coast, the hippies didn't fear the Mohawk as their pastors predicted, and before long the shears came out. We had as many detractors as supporters, but the big angry post-punk look paid off by scaring away

anyone who would give undue grief to the younger ones in our care. We were very protective of them that way, and I don't feel apologetic now, because I think every advance in social progress was the result of both its peace makers and its rabble rousers. Not that Mohawks and body metal are important, but that the opposite is true---that everyone young and old is accepted regardless of what they look like or what their music sounds like. That was a common theme for our bands back then, and in my opinion, a kind of landmark amendment. Sometimes outside our shows there'd be a guy or two shouting petty judgments at people about hair, clothing, or dancing, and they'd meet an army of rebuke from us, for the sake of the people we felt were in our care.

Another theme was that so many people came to concerts with their deepest needs, sometimes in crisis, looking for hope, advice, and practical help with serious situations. This was far more compelling work to me than the task of delivering the facts of the gospel, especially since most of the audience knew those facts and it was the speakers afterward who did that job. Our hearts---well, I should speak for myself but I learned this watching my band mates - it was about being there for people, mostly younger than us but not always, but who needed a good word from someone they felt was in touch with them. That wasn't hard, because who doesn't love loving people, but when people needed help beyond what a band guy from another town can really help with, I'd come home with a nagging feeling of helplessness. Not the worst thing, because it motivated me to look for better ways to help, and it reminded me that we were more than a rock show. Screw wondering if I was "called." When there's work to be done, no one needs permission.

### I read the note on your Facebook page that addresses your leaving the Altar Boys and 'ministry'... why exactly did you leave?

No short answer, because I didn't want to leave, and they didn't want me to, no doubt. I announced it right after the first tour for *Forever Mercy*. The circumstances? One: I enrolled in junior college to major in psych, carrying 18 units. Two: I thought it would also give me time to do the door-banging I expected to have to do to get *Holes in the Floor of Heaven* made. The Boys were supportive of the project, but our record label panned the idea the year or two before when I first showed them my demo. It turned out school was going to take up so much time and focus that I felt the rest should be devoted to strengthening my marriage. My "band-guy" schedule wasn't good for marriage, nor were other factors you know I'm already prepared to talk about here. Anyway, in 1990 I left all other projects behind to hit the books, settle down, and maybe start a family.

### Why was the record label not happy with *Holes*?

My timing was bad. When I called them, I think in '88 or '89 for an appointment about it, they weren't keen on the idea already because we'd just recorded *Against the Grain*, and they were in talks with Mike for *Do I Stand Alone*. Two new solo albums aren't the best thing for a band's new album to compete with I suppose. I played them the demo, and they didn't jump for joy. "Truly Helpless," "Laughter," and "See You in Person" weren't written yet anyway, come to think of it, so I don't blame them. But all of that was just circumstances.

### What was the motivating factor in wanting to do a solo album?

Boy I would have loved to have figured that out in '87. But the very thing that drove me was the battle inside to understand what was driving me. The answer again lies in who and what we are inside. I'll start small. I always felt at home writing songs with Mike's voice in mind, but by '87 I also found myself writing songs that were deeply personal, and given to more delicate arrangements. I built up quite a cassette load and the Boys called it, 'Ric's Solo Album.' One day I had the stones to play it for our record label. I didn't expect them to green-light it right off, but it seemed right to try anyway. When they gave me a polite but clear no, I figured *Against the Grain* was just out

## 23 DOWN THE LINE

and I was into that, so I shrugged off the side project idea for some other time and place.

Looking back, my head wasn't ready. Releasing it then would have meant talking a lot about myself in public and it wouldn't have been a good thing - it wouldn't have helped people. I was only starting to treat myself with any kindness about my inner battles - barely. In order to handle those subjects in a way that would help other people like myself and not hurt them, I would need to grow bigger stones. But the songs were bringing something home to me - something completely independent of sexual orientation. It started hitting me that I felt a life-long disconnection from the rest of humanity, and that it was because I let too few people really know me. It was getting harder to bury that awareness under my work, what with whole days riding in vans, airplanes, etc, where I'd get carsick from reading, and there's nothing to do but think. After you run out of ways to crack your friends up, and the tapes of Yes, Rush, and other brain candy bands wear out in your walkman, there's nothing left to give attention to but yourself.

So there I was, a stranger. Not a bad guy, just a new guy who would take me some getting used to, and who I kept under lock and chain, out of sight and alone in my don't-ask-don't-tell world. My battle wasn't so cut and dried anyway. I wouldn't concede to simply regarding myself as gay. Everybody knows there's that schoolyard ordinance that no one picks the gay kid for their team. Also, the standard Christian teaching was that calling it a sexual orientation is giving a nod to sin. It was an impossible equation, discovering that what you are, is something that your articles of faith insist doesn't even exist, or it's a sin to exist. So I held fast that I was suffering from something unknown, unexplained and universally misunderstood, and that the only person who I believed did understand, who could help me understand, hadn't been seen in person for 2000 years.

I never thought I was unloved. Loving and being loved, right out loud, was always plentiful in my life, but it occurred to me that by going through such a major struggle with no one knowing what it was, I wasn't letting people know me like one probably ought to for good health, and in order to really feel that connection with humanity. I saw love bombarding me from all around like so much solar wind, but because I wasn't open to people really knowing me, it was like love was bouncing off me, not quite getting in. I'm sure people felt they knew me just fine, but I felt like they couldn't. I didn't think I was unique in that, but all I could say about it was that people have inner battles that make them feel lonely no matter what, and that I was having a major one. When people who love you also know you because you let them inside you - that, I believed and became hopeful, would enable me to trust love, bask in it, and do a better job of sharing it.

So I had to sing out with my own voice. I re-recorded my home demo, adding "Truly Helpless," "See You in Person," and "Laughter," and played it out loud every chance I got. It was as transparent as I dared. Not that the lyrics have anything deliberately hidden in them, by any stretch. Thinking back now, most of them are snapshots, you know, impressions left on my mind in some kind of process of unfolding. The scenery and events are meant to illustrate internal

events in my life, and I guess the life of anyone who finds himself in an imperfect world, looking for a perfect God to perfect it. They describe what it was like to be me back then, but I knew better than to think my particular situation was the only one that can produce the kinds of anxieties, wonderment, ironies, and such that I was trying to describe.

The only hidden meaning I think I ever wrote, I took out. "Hold My Hand" originally had a metaphor whose meaning only I knew: "I stood at the gate at the final step, to gaze and gaze at the fires of hell, which seemed so nice and warm to me, but I did not go inside." It was me saying I think I'm gay and we all believe it's wrong, so I'm not going there. I cut it from the song and squeezed it onto the front of my bass, daring myself to be ready to answer any direct questions about it. No one asked, I guess because everyone found their own meaning in it, which every songwriter loves. A pastor actually used it as part of a little sermon. But I believe that song lyrics, no matter who directed at, are also from the writer, to the writer, and my previous advice, "Tell me what you mean, now, don't scream," was fast becoming, "Okay yeah, scream."

I think we are driven more by who and what we are, than by circumstances. Let me pontificate just for a second. I think personal transparency one to another is one of the things the world needs,



but sadly, putting your heart out there on your sleeve often gets dismissed as self-importance, and we shame each other for it. This is one of the things that keeps people shy, and like the man sang, shyness may seem nice, but it can stop you from doing things in life. What I'm saying is I'm going to spill some of my guts all over your magazine, if that's cool. Take it as an exercise in faith and trust. I've never quite done this before but now I have to, because my absence left good

people having to guess about some things from bits and pieces of second hand data. I won't describe what misunderstandings have been out there, and I don't know what they all are. But maybe we can set it all straight. It's only fair to the people who were there.

I once thought I was doing everyone a favor by staying completely out of sight, but now I think I may have been selfish, and doing this feels right. Our work as Altar Boys was possible because of people generously opening up their hearts and guts to us. How dare I not do the same, even after this long? This is only my side, by the way. This is the start of a conversation I hope to have with a lot of people. There is so much I don't know, which other people do.

**Ric had asked if he had permission to spill his guts, I told him, "You absolutely have my permission to spill your guts..."**

I'll start with the easy stuff. Growing up gay and celibate, there was a teaching going around about what to do if you think you're gay. It said that we each have the Son of God Himself to provide a life of intimate-yet-platonic male companionship, like it was with David and Jonathan. But there's a catch - that if you need more than the platonic from anyone, that need came from sin, so Christianity has no biblical provision for it, no matter how sincerely felt. So I didn't fool around, and did a good job burying any gay sexual or romantic drive I had right out of my own sight under the intensity of my work in Christian bands. Or, I just had that small of a sex drive. That was the excuse I always gave for not acting like a normal, slobbering horn-



dog about girls, but I think it had some truth to it overall. Earlier at age twenty I got counseling at church, where it was taught that homosexuality is a symptom of things that one can be healed from. After a few sessions, saying I didn't think I was quite healed, they told me to claim my healing and move on without questioning it, or even mentioning it. It seemed awfully simple, but easy for me because gay or straight, I wasn't all that strung out on the pursuit for sex, and I was eager to be a proper heterosexual in the flesh, and Jesus' lover in the spirit, so to speak.

Of course even once I started questioning it all later at around 28, I stayed away from gay sex because I was married to my best friend, a girl. If our environment was a gay-friendly one we probably would have been like TV's Will and Grace. But before marriage we just knew we were into each other and wanted to share the future. We didn't try sex together until we got married on a fast wave of new marriages at church, especially in our small group that did everything together as friends, then started pairing off and marrying. I was a virgin when I married at 23. Looking back, it was like I was 16.

When gay people come out young to lead healthy, happy gay lives, a lot of Christians accuse them of giving in to selfish desires. But in my 1983 Christian imperative to be the ever-so obedient one, a gay kid heroically choosing a heterosexual lifestyle like it was going to be some kind jewel in my crown, I was the one being indescribably selfish. I ruined seven plus years of her life, which was cut even shorter later by leukemia. If I could trade that crown for whatever I thought God or nature was gonna do to me for being gay, I would jump into anyone's lake of fire to give her back those years. I'd give up whatever eternal rewards good little boys get, just to have spent some time with her as a friend before losing her forever. Someone please memo the apostles, to amend their epistles (or otherwise clarify) and put a stop to that kind of insane destruction.

**I agree with you that transparency in any relationship is a must... how did that factor in with you being open about your sexuality with the Altar Boys...?**

I wasn't, and that seems unfair looking back, but I thought I was doing the right thing. I wish it weren't so, but the only people who knew I once went to church counseling about gayness were my counselors, my small group at church, and the other founding members of Undercover who never gave me the slightest grief about it, and treated me like the younger brother I felt I was. It created a bond between them and I that I robbed from the Altar Boys by being so opaque. I'm sorry for that. But by the time I was confirmed as an Altar Boy, married no less, I truly believed on advice from my counselors that it was all behind me and that was that.

As time went on and it became clear to me and my band mates that my emotional well-being was suffering from something, they simply kept encouraging me as part of the team, and quite literally held my hand through all the anxiety. I think Mike might have joked from time to time that he thought I might be gay. I think straight folks often do that when they think a friend is silently gay, in hopes to break down a wall between them and build trust. I knew I had their unconditional love, but even in all our efforts to keep our little corner of the ministry focused on people helping one another who were hurting – no matter what was hurting them – the world we worked in was still after all, the world of Christian evangelicalism, and I felt that our life's work hinged on me keeping that wall up, thinking I was doing myself, everybody,

and God a favor. It was much later that I put it into words, how my opaqueness was the thing that was crippling me – stopping me from taking in the love that was all around me.

The incongruity took its toll, producing nightmares, anxiety, waves of depression, and the return from younger days of a neurological thing they call sleep paralysis. It drove me to come right out to Bonnie about what was going on inside. After we talked I contacted my church's counseling center, and they put me in touch with what turned out to be a Christian in-patient clinic with different "tracks," including one for fending off homosexuality. I can't believe I did that. Two things though. It was essential to get some therapy, and lots of it. The focus wasn't on how not to have gay sex, especially since I hadn't had any anyway. There were people who checked in with depression, chemical dependency, abusive relationships, etc. A big part of those programs is stress and mood management, which was good.

But it wasn't all good. I was getting all this help and it was killing me that she (Bonnie) wasn't warm to getting any for herself, other than what they offered at church. Right at the beginning of my stay I was cut off from her, without notice, by someone – I never learned exactly who – who told her and not me, that we shouldn't see or talk to each other during that time and that I shouldn't come home when the program was done. When the time came I didn't immerse myself back in our church, because Bonnie was relying on that circle of support for herself, and I wanted that for her. I moved into a sober house with some others I knew from the clinic. All I could do was agonize and pray that those from whom she was seeking comfort and advice would do a good job of it. The aftercare work there was Christian oriented, as were most of my roommates, but from different schools of thought about faith. I heard different ways of thinking, and understood them – to my astonishment. But like the obedient boy I fancied myself trying to be, I was terrified by the idea of changing any of my fundamental Christian beliefs. I went straight from there to tour for *Forever Mercy*, then home to Bonnie to talk about our future, and maybe a family, enroll in school, and hang up my Altar Boy robes for the last time.



The prospect of going from band guy with wife-at-home, to mom and dad with kids was a reality check for both of us – that our chances were slim to none, given our situation. She hated saying

so, and I hated hearing it, but I knew it was true and we called it quits for good. With no marriage, no band, and leaving all our mutual Christian friends and church to her, I went into those 'fires of hell that seemed so warm' – the ones I did not go inside before – then right back out again with the singe of having destroyed the gay-celibacy I had foolishly relied on for self-worth. I raced back to school and to Christian out-patient gay sex rehab counseling, and back to that sober house, going to church with my housemates. I didn't dare think about recording an album. I was sure I'd screwed that for good. Later, when I went to record the vocals for the album, I was sure I had lost the person who wrote those songs. But as I sang and heard the playback, it all came flooding back and it started feeling like me again, like I was singing to myself, calling out to myself, forgiving myself for not being perfect, and forgiving humanity and the world for the same.

What I had the most to repent from was all those years of holding myself up in my mind as something special for never having gay sex, because those who had, had no less right to see God in person, no

less right to a hand to hold, or to dance en masse on God's shimmering sea of glass, as I ever thought I deserved for being celibate.

### How did you get hooked up with Steve and Derri from The Choir?

We were already buds from the road and worked together on earlier projects. By then though, I was keeping myself out of reach to everyone except my ex-wife. But there was Drew Jaya (Chef's Hat Boxing), and Bert, who were long-term fixtures in the technical crews of some of the bands, who found me and hung around. I like to think maybe Bonnie, for my sake, made sure they could contact me. Bert played my demo for Steve and Derri and arranged a meeting. If I remember it right, and I'm open to rebuttal, their primary question was simply if I wanted to do it. I was prepared to say, "By the way I turned out gay" but they spared me by saying, "By the way, we heard you were gay," like I'd taken up an interesting new hobby. I volunteered that I was, but I was getting help and I had no plans to present myself as a gay and proud Christian singer. They nodded affirmation, though I don't remember them actually requiring any of that from me. But I'm sure we all knew what the Mothership Christian industry of that time – those above the small labels, and control mainstream distribution and promotion – might have done to any of her native sons outing himself publicly with head held high, thinking he'd still have a place at the big family table. I wasn't going to do that anyway, still trying to fend off my own sexuality. I knew I was interviewing for a job I already held forever, but the one who came to that meeting unsure about my qualifications because of sexual orientation, was me. It was one of those make-or-break moments that came and went for me like a gentle breeze, but it hits me to know there are meetings at other labels under that giant ship that go very differently, and people in my same situation come away feeling far worse than anything I had the stones to risk back then.

But just after the album came out, it was suddenly a done deal as far as I could see. I couldn't go out and tour as a Christian, not in 1991. News of my sexcapade had gotten around, and I heard that some churches were pulling the album from their bookstore shelves, including my alma mater, the Anaheim Vineyard. I got a phone call from one of the lay pastors telling me to come to their offices to stand before them (their words) to declare my repentance. It struck me odd, because I knew that they knew I'd gone directly back into Christian ex-gay counseling for that very purpose. What was all that when I was twenty, about claiming healing and moving on? But they said if I didn't show up I'd be officially handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, (their words) so that my soul might be saved. I asked them what that meant and they said so that Satan would kill my body before my soul went too far into sin (too far for what?), and in order to grant him access to me they have to cut me cut off from the body of Christ, so I'd better show up. My first impulse was to be that obedient kid again, to rush to do everything they would require of me, and win back their acceptance for that dutiful child I'd been at age 21 and a half. But I stopped when I realized what that would do to him. My stones grew three sizes that day.

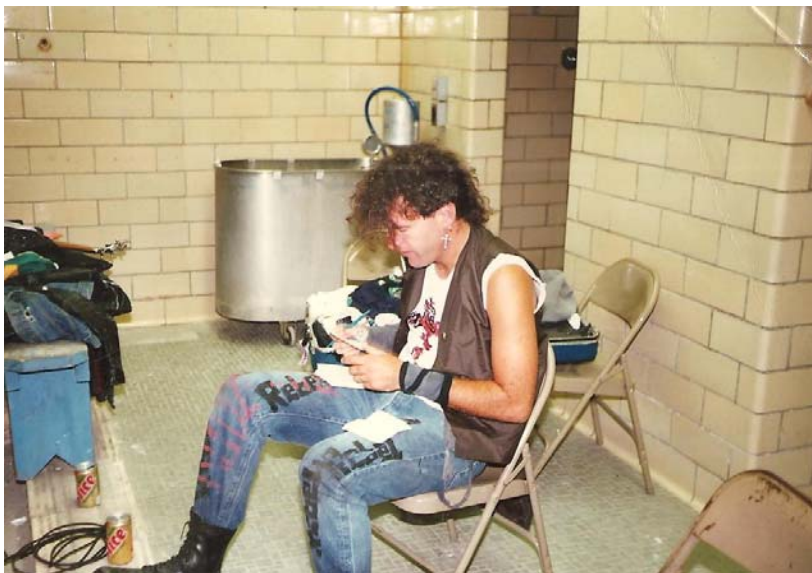
This kid needed help, and – just like all those kids back in Altarboy land – needed a good word from someone he felt was in touch with him. That had to be me, and seven years as an Altar Boy gave me

loads of practice. So I rescued that kid from thinking he was about to be handed over to people who could so arrange his early death. Nor was I going to let him believe that his God was the kind who would send an invisible monster to chase him down at the behest of his aunts and uncles in Christ. I never felt so truly helped and helpful, so unlocked, unchained, and monster-free as I felt hanging up that phone. I was taking charge of my own beliefs, clearing out the temple so to speak.

If God is true, men are liars. I had to let God rule and nothing else – not the book, the church, not anything I piled onto my back after I set out to follow the Son of God, sight unseen 14 years earlier. If there's a secret world – a pure world in the heart of God – then it didn't need any of the stuff we've tried to shove into it in our attempts to define it for each other, requiring each other's strict adherence. Not that there weren't babies in that bath water, but everyone knows how to throw out bath water without throwing out a baby. I mean like, duh.

So I dove into my life, and it included dating guys. Maybe gay Christians have gotten better at explaining that by 2010, but not me, not then. So I didn't explain, and never have. There I was, queer I was, and I was getting used to it. No God in any Heaven I could imagine would subject any of his children to the bullet-dance people were making his gay kids do to reconcile themselves for everyone's approval. As far as I could guess, anyone in God's kingdom who chooses to twist his own face into a painful, ugly shape at the idea of sharing it with their gay brothers and sisters, God would just as soon let them stay in their ugly pain as long as they want to, until they learn to think better, and without any of his children having to prove a case. As if.

What I never got used to though, because of the timing of my execu... I mean, excommunication... was having to walk away from the prospect of touring for *Holes*. I did play here and there before it



hit the stores, but it wouldn't serve anyone for me to go out under the banner of a specific world view and keep my home life – one generally condemned by that view – a secret (remember loved and known?). Anyone who's tried can tell you, but I can only imagine what it's like to be constantly on guard against conversations where folks talk about what they did on a weekend, who you share a home with and how, etc. There'd be no moral way to go out other than to keep it real, and in 1991, who in that mothership was gonna throw a party for our brand new label and her 'surprise-he's-gay artist'? I was tempted a little to go right to the Christian mainstream saying, "Here I am, your native son, let's do a tour and yeah I have a boyfriend so what," and let the

sparks fly in full public view, as they should. But I didn't want to drag Glasshouse (Steve and Derri) with me into a publicized issue war against the mothership, after promising them that I had no such intention. So I just let it be. Whether those were words of wisdom is strictly up to anyone, and anything can change.

My belief system re-grew with the conviction that God is a lover of truth, and therefore doesn't require us to point at that which we can't possibly be certain about, and call it a certainty at the expense of a person's well-being. A choice to impair another person's well-being on the grounds of something we can't be certain about is nothing other than a choice to impair someone, and should be met with an army of rebuke by all good people seeking to serve a good God. Given that, if we are endowed by our creator with anything, it is the freedom we each have to imagine and embrace any thought about Him, new or time-honored, that enhances one's own ability to live well and love well. This has to be far more important than picking the

right name for God, the right book of scriptures, the right whatever, like trying to win a trip to Heaven on a game show where you have to guess what's behind doors and under boxes.

So anyway, there I was a year later, with an amazing boyfriend, starting what has become the best part of my life. I did touch base here and there with blokes from the old crowd but I immersed myself in new things. I got very busy in school and interning at various HIV/AIDS organizations. Drew Jaya and I started a band in L.A called, Chef's Hat Boxing, with me off the bass and having a proper go at six strings. The Human Sound (Altar Boys) was always on the set list, as well as Laughter, See You In Person, and Pretty Blue Things from *Holes*. It was the Nirvana 90's and we had fun adding all that dirt and iron to the guitar work on those songs. The re-vamped "Laughter" made it onto our six song demo. Club audiences were a healthy mix, with boyfriend proudly holding my seat for me next to him while I was on stage with Drew and the others. It felt good not hiding anything or promoting anything other than brutal honesty and good musical composition. We haven't played in ages now, but if geography and our other careers didn't prohibit, we probably would.

**I saw on your Facebook page at one time that you called yourself an evangelistic agnostic.... what does that mean? Do you still claim the Christian faith?**

That "Religious Views" status was when I first signed up and I was kidding, kinda. It was at the end of a long office day, and I guess I was in a colorful mood. I've changed it since. My showing up started with an email from an old friend from the earliest days, Jerry Davis, who played bass with Gym and Ojo when I first met them. He mentioned running into everyone through Facebook. I had to see if I couldn't find a way to integrate my estranged worlds. When I thought I got a pink slip from God at age 21 I thought I lost everything. When I came back a couple of years later as an Altar Boy, it turned out I hadn't lost anything other than the time I was apart from my brothers. Now here we are, love intact, and I don't want to lose another day. Today I don't feel cut off from any family I'd ever belonged to. I have to say here that I never believed that Chris or John Wimber even knew about that phone call I got from church. If they had, they would've checked with me personally, and heads would have rolled in full public view. Nor do I feel I have to keep love under lock and chain, or that anything will ever stop me again from drinking in the deep wonders of the Earth, the sky, or whatever we can imagine lies beyond.

The coolest thing is I'm finding myself back in the presence of some of my old band mates, doing this and that musically, but mostly enjoying being back in their midst, one by one. Gym, Ojo, and I are on an upcoming Dead Artist Syndrome track with Brian Healy. There's an Undercover track in process as well, waiting for me to be done with all this jabbering and fire up that bass.

Okay so am I Christian today? I leave that to others to decide, because faith-group identity doesn't matter to me, and I don't think it would matter to anyone in Heaven. I thought I was an atheist for a brief time, but my skepticism won out against it. If there are those who genuinely worry about my well being and hinge it on whether I qualify for a Christian identity, I recognize that as an expression of

love. If they get to know me and they see me as one of their own, then I am and can be no other. If some see me as a child of the devil, to be avoided and estranged, I regard myself their brother no less, and implore them to think things through about how to regard their brothers.

In 1978 when I asked the Son of God to come into my heart and mind and to use me for his good purposes I meant it, and I meant it when I committed my life to his work. I've never withdrawn that request, or that commitment. I would be lying though, not to say that it means different things to me now than what it meant then, but not so different as I or anyone would have thought. As Christians do, I want to see a better world. I want there to be more to existence than what we can yet see and feel. I want death to be conquered and bad guys stopped from doing bad things until badness is a thing of the past and we're all good guys. I want all good beings, seen or unseen, to be praised for the good they do, and are, and I want to be taught by them. These things aren't limited to Christianity, but I



learned them as a Christian. How can I not see myself as a part of their world, and they a part of mine, whether anyone feels that way or not?

**Why is it, by your estimation, that in the world of Christendom people are so completely opposed to the idea of homosexuality? It seems that in the world we live in (inside the church), there are so many gray areas, or areas that we make allowances for, but never with homosexuality... and why is the "gay but celibate" issue so**

**prevalent? By comparison, how many straight people in the church stay celibate, probably not many?**

Nearly none I'm sure, especially given that every heterosexual can get a sin-free ticket out of celibacy via the sacrament of Holy matrimony. In addition to that, singles are allowed their romantic relationships, which aren't condemned despite the occasional romp in times of weakness. Then, after washing themselves in the blood they still get to feel that their love itself is applauded and blessed, all the while pointing at their gay brothers and sisters with shame just for wanting to snuggle and call one another, "The one I love."

I have some ideas about why so many people have such a disproportionately painful reflex about gayness, compared to so many other items on their lists of things they think people shouldn't do. It's not just in the Christian world either, but I think the Christian name is stamped on it in the Western world because those who hold anti-gay sentiments seem to run to the Christian Bible in order to defend their reactions. The more we see them doing that, the more it indicates that they can't find a defense using reason, ethics, or common sense. Drop God's name onto something, however, and enough people will applaud it, no matter how unfair, unkind, or unreasonable. Things are changing though.

Very long ago, around when I first became a Christian, a person related at a gathering how he was sharing the Gospel to someone at work that day and the guy told him how he had feelings for another guy. His response to the poor guy was, "Well, that's the worst sin there is." The reaction in the room was basically, "Yeah that's right, you did good." I think in some of those rooms today, it might have been different. I hear much less of that kind of reflex today than back



when I was immersed in that environment. There is so much less of that than I expected when I set out to reconnect, and that adds so much to this hope that progress is moving along, and we're getting over our fears, or whatever it is that's been causing these reflexes.

I'm no anthropologist, but I like to think we inherit reflexes like that from our ancestors, like so many of what today are our irrational fears and hypersensitivities. It may be tied to the same impulses that produce the aversion to the thought of a male desiring to take on an otherwise female role. From deep into history men spent so much time and energy establishing them selves as worthy to be called a man. Perhaps people deep inside feel that gay guys are mocking

that whole process – the whole institution of manliness – simply by taking on the 'female role' of making love to a man. I imagine that fierce imperative for manliness was necessary for the survival of groups of our ancestors during very lean times in history. I haven't done all the science on that, but I like thinking along those lines anyway because it helps me be less judgmental of others for their irrational gut reactions, knowing I have my own that I have to get over in order to help me live and love better here in 2010.

Have I conquered any of my own? I mentioned a time when I was first writing songs for *Holes*, that I was just barely starting to show some grace toward my self about the prospect of even just recognizing my own gayness. So now, while defending people against that unkindness, at the same time I have to forgive people for having that reflex, in order to forgive myself for once having almost the same one even though I was my worst victim (I can only hope). Maybe the principle behind, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those..." works in multiple directions. I think we're all on our way, and that we won't always have to create these distinct ideological communities based on differing thoughts on God and Society, where a person thinks he has to choose one to be loyal to, disavowing all others, and thus the people in them. And in between, unseen and un-accessed in all that tearing asunder, is the love that we bear for one another, not *would*, but *do bear*. Most of us never know it's there, or never get to. Boy I sure got to in recent months. There, I'm getting lyrical again. I always do when I think of the things we've been talking about.

**You wrote this "It was an impossible equation, discovering that what you are, is something that your articles of faith insist doesn't even exist, or it's a sin to exist." Do you think it is possible that there has been a misinterpretation in the Christian faith in regards to the theology of homosexuality? Can who Jesus was as a person be separated from the theology that is so prevalent in the church? Are you able to separate Him from the theology?**

As surely as a vague, grossly incomplete description about my friend is separate from my friend himself. If a person can't find Jesus in any other place but the Bible, what does that say about that person's faith in his actual existence right there next to him? On the night I decided my life belonged to Jesus, I experienced all the things

people say they experience. One of them being a sense of being suddenly different from a moment before, a sense of assurance of being forgiven for wrongdoing, and the feeling of a new world opening up for me, centered on the Son of God. Nowhere in that experience was there the conviction that the person I was following was bound to the Bible. Even though it was at a home Bible study, on that night there was no sense of being drawn spiritually to the Bible as an instruction manual for my new life. It was after some arguing, and a few more visits – very long and late sessions of being surrounded with hands laid on me that I conceded to what they insisted, to regard the Bible as the beginning and end of absolute truth about the universe and beyond. It was weeks before I discovered also that the group had a label – Born Again Christian – for what we were doing and experiencing. The term as I knew it, didn't adequately convey what I thought we were seeking, and experiencing. I'd just been saying things like, 'Oh, I follow Jesus now, and he's forgiven my sins, and lives inside me.'

Okay, so what of The Christian Faith, and it's popular prohibition against gayness? Hard to say exactly, because everyone seems to believe a little bit differently from everyone else, and I don't see any one set of beliefs I can point to, to call, "The Christian Faith." What do we mean, by "Christianity"? While it's mentioned in the Bible that there were groups of people calling themselves Christians by name, I find no actual commandment for a follower of Jesus to do so, and thus, no need to conform himself into a document intended to represent all we think we know, but can't possibly be certain of. Not in order to pursue Jesus, anyway, or do his work.

Given that distinction, and our hysterical – I mean historical tendency to rule each other from our fear reflexes – then yes, it is so very possible that Christian restrictions on same sex relationships are mistaken, with deadly consequences. Whether the mistake is the doctrine of the Bible's inerrancy or in how leaders are interpreting the manuscript for others, the damage speaks for itself in so many ways, from loss of love to loss of life, and the disenfranchisement of countless people who want God as their Father, but are made to believe he would not have them unless they make themselves into someone else. That message to many people, including any gay person (but not stopping there) is, "Come to the kingdom and live abundantly, well, it won't be you exactly, but whatever's left after most of what you know as 'you' is slowly shamed to death and forgotten."

In places where anti-gay attitudes are particularly strong, the message "Jesus Loves You" becomes, "Jesus would love for us to twist you into something that won't make him puke." Not that I need a count, but how many times in the Gospels did Jesus' detractors, and even his followers get themselves in a wad about whom he chose to hang out and break bread with? If there is an eternal kingdom beyond this one, filled with love and wonder, let no one feel he is hopelessly shut out from it, or being crushed under it.

***You wrote, "I stood at the gate at the final step, to gaze and gaze at the fires of hell, which seemed so nice and warm to me, but I did not go inside." That is an amazing metaphor for so much in life, not just spiritually, but for many things that pull and push against us... good words! Some of the most profound words from this entire article came here, "If God is true, men are liars. I had to let God rule and nothing else – not the book, the church, not anything I piled onto my back after I set out to follow the Son of God, sight unseen, 14 years earlier. If there's a secret world – a pure world in the heart of God – then it didn't need any of the stuff we've tried to shove into it in our attempts to define it for each other, requiring each other's strict adherence. Not that there weren't babies in that bath water, but everyone knows how to throw out bath water without throwing out a baby."***

Funny and telling what a lyric can do for a person when he needs them to. I remember after my excommunication, having that line from "God Rules" in my head, "God is true, men are liars!" I just let the words loop around in there therapeutically, Bill's voice shouting like that. Sim's too, our two bands having played all those festivals together. I was saving myself, or someone was. Not necessarily my

very life, but most of the stuff that makes a person a person. I bet they never thought that line would have that affect on someone. Another song I'm grateful for was Mike Stand's, "I'm Only Human:" "Nothing more and nothing less, please let's not forget." It made me feel less estranged, hearing Mike's voice, which was always a kind of foundation, singing those things especially. Even in my absence from the band, it made me feel connected in a way I hadn't before, and gives me confidence that putting my heart out there is the right thing to do. I think that's one of the things music and art do for people. Plus, it helped me deal with the feeling of having let huge crowds of people down. It comes right back into mind today whenever someone expresses disappointment that I haven't continued in the propagation of their faith. Slowly over my time in Christian bands, I seemed to shift from promoting a set of beliefs, to promoting, within the context of my faith, the well-being of the people within it and without it.

### **Are you still happily married to your man?**

Oh yes, going on 16 years, in every way but legal of course. Not being legal hasn't hurt our relationship itself in any way I can tell, but we're the lucky ones. There should be nothing less than fully legal marriage for the sake of the countless couples who need it, want it, and so clearly deserve it. For me, an unjustifiable prohibition from a standard social institution – that's an attack against human dignity. That's how I'm affected, and that's what I see affecting many people, even those who, like countless heterosexuals, don't plan to marry. When someone complains, "Why do they need to call it, 'Marriage'?", I ask in return, doing my best not to growl the words, "Why do you need them not to?" Sometimes that's the only response that's deserved. When someone responds with a lengthy, heartfelt explanation of his own dignity, he is being very patient and generous, and it feels just like having to explain to a child why he shouldn't bite his playmates.

Absurd that there are people who, if I presume that my love and the life I live are of equal value to theirs, are offended by my saying so, to the point of making certain that the government – aka "Caesar" to Christians – says I'm not. Who wouldn't stand up and cry foul at the idea of being constitutionally defined as less valuable, and/or legitimate? I say let's learn to esteem one another as highly as ourselves. I'm not the first to say it.

**Do you ever think that you might record again as just a solo artist? I'm stoked about the DAS & the Undercover stuff that is coming, but *Holes* was a defining record in my life for various reasons. I would love to hear/have something along these lines again.**

I can't tell you how much it means to hear that, even after all this time, and I would love to do more things along those lines. I didn't expect so many people to even know that the album ever existed. I have no idea how it did before it went back in the can. I have what I need to record music with a little help from my friends, and ideas are forming based on the things I've learned since my last band, and things I experienced doing this interview. I'm about to put some vocals on some not-so-serious things, not as follow up for anything, but "just because." But that's just to get my feet wet again. Regardless of what happens to *Holes* itself, or to Chef's Hat Boxing's music, of course I'm going to make music and put it out. I've been developing material on bass and other instruments in front of friends, non-stop for 12 plus years, so it's about time I started doing it in front of strangers again, as we become less estranged. I'll always put my heart in it, since I know no other way. Putting our hearts out there was the key to our best work as Altar Boys, and by "work" I don't just mean songwriting, but all the various ways there are for connecting with people, and doing some good.



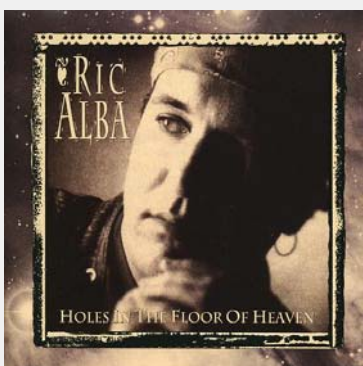
**VEIL OF ASHES  
PAIN**

1989 Graceland Records

Purchase: [Ebay.com](http://Ebay.com)

Review by: Steve Ruff

Originally intended as the first part of a trilogy, *Pain* was a worthy release by this band when they were just getting started. I still think it was an edgy decision to open the album with a Dylan song, especially in Christian music circles circa 1989. The thing I loved about Veil of Ashes was that they dealt with real issues and sang about stuff that affected most people. They weren't with the "happy, go lucky" crowd of the day, they dealt with stuff that was real and sincere, and they asked the tough questions. With a name that was taken from a 77's song (a little trivia there), you would expect great music with an honest message from this band. This line-up consisted of Sean Doty, Sterling (Brian Kirsch), Phil Meads and Lance Harris, with contributions from Steve Hindalong, Derri Daugherty and the sorely missed Gene Eugene. This was early alternative Christian rock from a band that put out several great releases, courted their fair share of controversy, and left the scene too soon. You can probably find this indie rock record through eBay, or you can check it out through Veil of Ashes Facebook page. They were kind enough to upload all their songs for fans to enjoy. Stay tuned to the Facebook page as well, there appears to be something on the horizon.



**RIC ALBA  
HOLES IN THE FLOOR OF  
HEAVEN**

1991 Glasshouse

Purchase: [Ebay.com](http://Ebay.com)

Review by: Steve Ruff

This is one of those records that was very defining for me as a teenager. I clearly remember getting it as a cassette, and I remember being blown away for a couple of reasons. I was stunned at the lyrical poetry that was inside, and I was excited at how different it was musically when compared to the Altar Boys (which was where I was familiar with Ric up until that point). I think this ranks in my top ten albums of the 90's because it is so emotionally raw and honest that I can still be moved dramatically when listening to it. That's what makes music great in my opinion. This was a cathartic record for me due to the lyrical content, and I think that mood and the images shared are so intense that the listener cannot help but be moved by them.

The players on here are well known in the music world: next to Ric there was Steve Hindalong, Derri Daugherty, Rob Watson and Greg Flesch. This one didn't seem to get enough exposure when it came out, and if interested you will have to search eBay for it now because it's not available anywhere at this point. Musically it doesn't fit any one category, I understand the comparisons to The Cure that I have often heard, especially in songs like "Hold My Hand" and "Laughter." There are also more stripped down tracks that really allow Ric's vocals to shine like "Heaven (prelude)," "In The Heart Of God" and "See You In Person." All in all the disc is varied musically, but the music provides a beautiful vehicle for the lyrics which at times feel like an exorcism, an admission or a truly "heart on the sleeve" cry for acceptance of oneself. This is a brilliant release that still holds up well after almost 20 years - find one and get it!



**KING'S X  
XV**

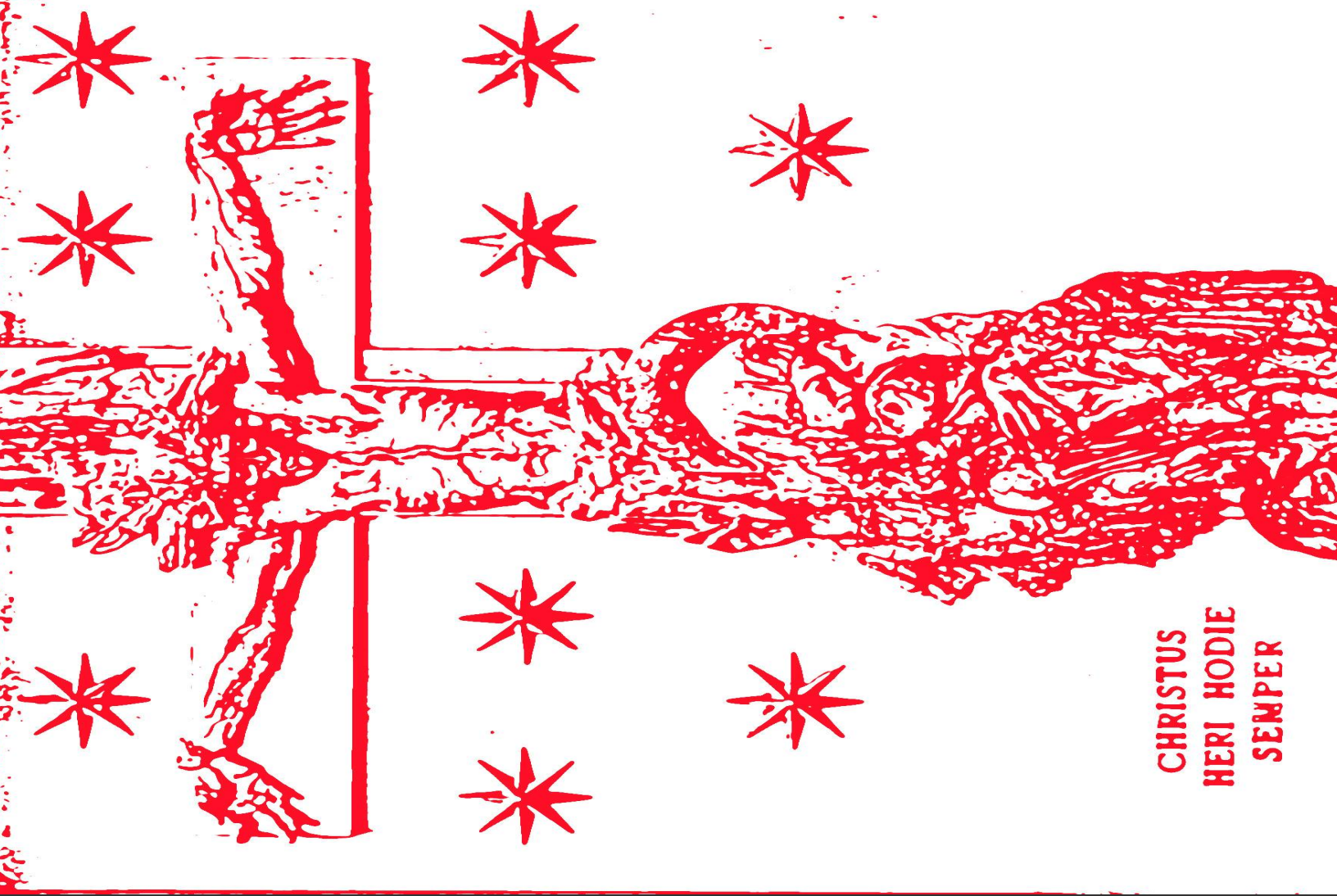
2008 InsideOut Music

Purchase: [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

Review by: Steve Ruff

Obviously we are reviewing the last King's X record a couple of years after it came out, but it is still the most recent addition so I hope that is okay. This latest King's X could have been a release full of singles in my opinion. Every track on this record was a stand out, sing-along good time! From the opening chords of "Pray," to the last hammered out sing along strains of "Go Tell Somebody," this record is a return to form of earlier King's X in my opinion. These guys have been hammering it out for 30 years, and as musicians progress and change, obviously the music does as well. King's X have always been stand-out at progressive metal with Beatlesque harmonies, and this record has that in spades. This is the kind of music that sticks in your head for days. Thirty years in and these guys continue to get better, it is odd that they haven't seen more commercial success, especially since so many other acts cite them as an influence. If you missed this gem, get it today! There are also a couple of bonus tracks on the iTunes download 😊

Yes, this is it. No, we are not offering any answers. Yes, we know that some things were said that you might not agree with. There are some things we might not agree with, either. That is not the point. The point is for you to hear the stories of others that you might not have listened to otherwise. We don't have the answers for the question of homosexuality in the Church. Neither does anyone interviewed here, if you noticed. But we want to open up the dialogue. And to say that somewhere, at least, there are those that are not afraid to have the conversation.



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